

Friis, John

From: Hannah Klein [crazytwirler@sbcglobal.net]
Sent: Sunday, March 15, 2009 5:35 PM
To: Friis, John
Subject: HB6666, Section 5

Dear Mr. Friis,

I am a student at the Educational Center for the Arts in New Haven, and I am writing you this letter in response to Section 5 of House Bill HB6666. Passing this bill is absolutely necessary if the Educational Center for the Arts is to continue to be the successful and inspirational environment that it now is for so many high school students. As a junior at ECA in the dance department, I can personally testify that ECA has shaped my high school experience as well as contributed to my future. High school is a confusing period of life where one's body is changing, ideas are forming, friendships and relationships grow, and futures are decided. The four years spent in high school are where each individual begins to carve the path for the rest of his/her life. It is there that teenagers need to be inspired and challenged to help them realize their own potential as well as help them become intellectual adults.

One might then respond that there are public high school and private schools to provide this experience. However, as a student in public school, I found it was not enough. I, along with all the other students at ECA, needed more from our schools. We are all artistic individuals who wanted more than limited electives in a sport dominated public school. Whether we are at ECA for dance, writing, music, theater, or art; each and every one of us realized that something was missing in our school experience. I found that I was simply not creatively inspired at public school. But at ECA, my mind and ingenuity are constantly being challenged. Each one of my dance teachers has helped me grow in a way that I never knew was possible.

Before going to ECA, I danced at a studio where we wore flashy costumes with even flashier smiles. I did not know that dance could ever be more than rhinestones and shimmies. My first reaction when I saw an ECA dance performance was, "why are none of them smiling?" My mother explained to me that here dance could be looked at in a different way, where it was an art form that did not solely exist to entertain the audience. The purpose of the dances at ECA was to convey a message or idea, or maybe even just to be the physical formation of the choreographer's thought. I have matured so much through the dance department that I look at choreography from a new perspective seeing it as a form of expression.

I do not believe that this experience would have been possible without having a department of teachers who work and live as professional dancers and choreographers. Won't a science student learn more from a teacher who has conducted research in a laboratory than a teacher who just went to college and got his/her certification? To be a truly excellent teacher, that person has to have lived and experienced what they teach. My teachers at ECA are able to say, "when I danced with the Martha Graham company..." What more qualification is necessary than real true experience in the field that they teach? The teachers in every department are still working in their field, and can provide opportunities to their students through their connections as working artists. For example, the dance department has the privilege of taking classes from such famous choreographers as Earl Mosely, a man who was part of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company and has choreographed for major companies around the world. By having him as a teacher at ECA, students are introduced to dances that are literally being performed by some of the best dance companies and have connections directly to the Alvin Ailey School of Dance. I myself have been given the opportunity to be treated as a member of dance company. This year, a member of the Ana Sakalow Company came from NYC every Monday to teach as pieces of Ana Sakalow's repertire. We performed and learned this material as if we were true professionals.

How will certification help students at ECA? The point of any educational bill should be to do what will most benefit the students. By not allowing us to be taught by professionals working in our field of interest, the state of Connecticut is hurting our arts education. Do I want to have a teacher that has a piece of paper saying he/she is certified to teach, or do I want my teacher to have been a member of the Merce Cunningham Company, worked as a choreographer for Alvin Ailey, or have founded their own dance company? I want a teacher who will give me the best taste of life as a real dancer. I want to learn from someone who has experience beyond a piece of paper. Part of the beauty and incredible experience of attending ECA, is to have teachers who are not just teachers, but actual artists who teach because they want to pass on their knowledge and inspire their students to love and cherish the art community.

Please take what I have written into consideration, because by requiring ECA teachers to be certified, students will suffer. Thank you for reading my letter and for your continued service to our state.

Sincerely,

Hannah Klein

Educational Center for the Arts, Class of 2010